



In the Path of the Storms: Bayou La Batre, Coden, and the Alabama Coast

Frye Gaillard, Sheila Hagler, Peggy Denniston

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The Gulf Coast villages of Bayou La Batre and Coden are two of Alabama's most distinctive, with roots going back to the French settlements of the 18th century. For generations, the proud inhabitants of these communities have extracted their modest livings from the sea, sustained by a lesson handed down over time—that providing for the needs of one's family is the only true measure of success. But the world has changed drastically for them. A global economy of higher gas prices and cheap imported seafood has threatened the lifeblood of the area. And in recent years a rash of hurricanes, culminating with Hurricane Katrina, has battered the hopes and dreams of these Bayou towns.

But they have known hard times and massive changes before. In the 1970s, refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos flooded into the area and within a few years made up a third of the local population. Three Buddhist temples soon took their places among the Catholic, Baptist, and Pentecostal churches that predominated, and for a time the different ethnic groups coexisted in a kind of uneasy peace. But now they are learning to pull together in an uncertain struggle to rebuild their communities.

In the Path of the Storms is a powerful portrait in words and photographs of a unique and unforgettable place. It is a story of tradition, and forces of change, and the epic struggle of these Gulf Coast communities to survive and thrive.

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